

ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SERVICES
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

on behalf of
Miller Homes

South Tyneside College
St George's Avenue
South Shields
Tyne and Wear

archaeological building recording

report 6418
March 2026

Contents

1.	Summary	1
2.	Project background	2
3.	Landuse, topography and geology	2
4.	Historical and archaeological development	3
5.	The buildings	4
6.	Conclusions	7
9.	Sources	7
Appendix: Index of buildings		9

Photographs

Photo 1:	The college administration building, looking south-east
Photo 2:	The Navigation department, looking east
Photo 3:	The observatory at the north end of the Navigation department, looking east
Photo 4:	The Marine and Mechanical Engineering Department looking south-west
Photo 5:	Workshops, looking south-east
Photo 6:	Workshops, looking south
Photo 7:	Electrical and Radio Department, looking south-east
Photo 8:	Entrance Building, looking north-east
Photo 9:	Flagpole and anchor outside the entrance building, looking north
Photo 10:	The communal building, looking east
Photo 11:	East end of the Navigation Department with link to the building department and workshops, looking south-east
Photo 12:	The planetarium dome, looking south
Photo 13:	Science Department, looking north-east
Photo 14:	Science Department, looking north
Photo 15:	The kitchen department, looking north-west
Photo 16:	The women's work department, looking south-east
Photo 17:	Accommodation block attached to the Women's Work Department, looking west
Photo 18:	The Commerce and Art Department, looking north-west
Photo 19:	The Physical Education Department, looking north-west
Photo 20:	Extension to the workshops, looking east
Photo 21:	Workshops, looking west
Photo 22:	Workshops, looking south
Photo 23:	Engineering and Navigation Department, looking north-west
Photo 24:	Engineering and Navigation Department (Block G), looking south-west
Photo 25:	1960s accommodation block, looking south
Photo 26:	1960s accommodation block, looking north-east
Photo 27:	1960s accommodation block, looking north
Photo 28:	1970s college buildings, looking east
Photo 29:	1970s college buildings, looking east
Photo 30:	Entrance to Dr Winterbottom Hall, looking north-east
Photo 31:	Plaque on the side of the Dr Winterbottom Hall, looking north
Photo 32:	Common Room, looking south
Photo 33:	Dr Winterbottom Hall Refectory, looking west
Photo 34:	Accommodation blocks, looking north
Photo 35:	Accommodation Block, looking south
Photo 36:	Accommodation Block, looking north-east
Photo 37:	Accommodation block, looking north

Photo 38:	Gymnasium, looking north-east
Photo 39:	Planetarium dome, looking south-east
Photo 40:	Planetarium dome, looking south-west
Photo 41:	North-west corner of the planetarium, looking south-east
Photo 42:	West wall of the planetarium corridor, looking east
Photo 43:	Atrium of the planetarium, looking west
Photo 44:	View of the planetarium dome from the atrium, looking south-east
Photo 45:	Atrium staircase, looking east
Photo 46:	Planetarium corridor, looking south
Photo 47:	Plant room, looking east
Photo 48:	Double-doors opening into the planetarium, looking north-west
Photo 49:	East side of the planetarium, looking south-east
Photo 50:	West side of the planetarium, looking south
Photo 51:	View of the planetarium dome, looking south
Photo 52:	View of the apex of the dome, looking south
Photo 53:	Gutter around the internal edge of the planetarium dome for fluorescent tube lighting, looking east
Photo 54:	Down-lighting set into the gutter, looking west
Photo 55:	Air vents in the east wall of the planetarium, looking north-east
Photo 56:	Air vents in the west wall of the planetarium, looking south
Photo 57:	Cupboard at the south-east corner of the planetarium, looking south-east
Photo 58:	Cupboard at the north-west corner of the planetarium, looking west
Photo 59:	Fire escape door on the south side of the planetarium, looking south

Figures

Figure 1:	Site location
Figure 2:	Site as existing
Figure 3:	Internal and external plans and profile of the planetarium

1. Summary

The project

- 1.1 This report presents the results of an archaeological building recording project conducted in advance of the proposed demolition of the college buildings at South Tyneside College. A basic photographic survey was made of the existing college structures. The planetarium building was subject to a measured survey and detailed photography.
- 1.2 The works were commissioned by Miller Homes and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.
- 1.3 The significance of South Tyneside college lies in its origins as a maritime college rather than in the architecture of the existing buildings. Designed as a Marine and Technical college, the architecture employed owes nothing to the original 1867-9 Marine School building on Ocean Road, which was constructed in an Elizabethan revival style in red brick with stone dressings. The present college buildings were mainly erected between 1952 and 1964. They drew their design from contemporary educational architecture, with the widespread use of steel frames with both clear and coloured (often vibrant) glazing, as well as brick and concrete. Most of the buildings were equipped with flat roofs, with the exception of the workshops at the north and south ends of Block E which feature distinctive sawtooth roofs whose shape may have deliberately evoked waves.
- 1.4 The planetarium at South Tyneside College has significance as the first such facility in North-East England, introducing students at the college and residents and school children from the wider region to the night sky. It remained in use from the early 1960s until 2006 when it was finally closed. In 2008 the planetarium was stripped of its projector, and at around the same time the original seating was also removed to leave just the shell of the building. The loss of the projecting equipment and the seating which were integral to the original design and function of the building has impacted on the overall significance of the surviving structure. Additionally, the purpose-built nature of the building meant that it was difficult to repurpose. After a period of use as an interfaith chaplaincy, the space was subsequently used for the storage of furniture and equipment from the college. As the room had fallen out of regular use it was no longer properly maintained. As a consequence the surviving Planetarium structure is now in a poor condition, with clear evidence for water ingress through the dome and also through the main access corridor.

2. Project background

Location (Figures 1 and 2)

- 2.1 South Tyneside College lies to the south of the village of Westoe, near South Shields, Tyne and Wear, at grid reference NZ 37394 65978.

Development proposal

- 2.2 The proposed development entails the demolition of the college buildings and a residential development.

Objective

- 2.3 The objective of the project was to provide a general photographic record of the college buildings in their present state, and a more detailed record of the planetarium, together with assessments of its historical and archaeological significance and the impact of the proposed works. A brief summary of the history of the area is provided as background information. The updated regional research framework *North-East Regional Research Framework for the Historic Environment* (NERRF 2.0) (<https://researchframeworks.org/nerf/> accessed 13-03-2026) contains an agenda for archaeological research in the region. The scheme of works was designed to address agenda item MO10: How can we record and understand changing architectural styles?

Specification summary

- 2.4 The works have been undertaken in accordance with a Specification provided by the archaeological advisor to the Council (Reference MON18117).

Dates

- 2.5 The college and planetarium were examined on 26th February 2026. This report was prepared for March 2026.

Personnel

- 2.6 Research, survey, and report preparation work were carried out by Jamie Armstrong with the assistance of Katharine Fenton-Smith, and the graphics were prepared by Janine Watson.

Archive/OASIS

- 2.7 The project archive is currently held by Archaeological Services Durham University and will be transferred to the Tyne and Wear Museums Service in due course. Archaeological Services Durham University is registered with the **Online AccesS** to the **Index** of archaeological investigationS project (**OASIS**). The OASIS ID number for this project is **archaeol3-541313**.

3. Landuse, topography and geology

Landuse

- 3.1 The college occupies land immediately to the south of the historic village of Westoe, within the wider South Tyneside conurbation. The surrounding land is dominated by residential premises, with Robert Readhead Park at the south-west corner of the campus.

Site and situation

- 3.2 The south-west corner of the college stands at an elevation of 29m OD, with the land rising gradually to the north-east to a height of 36m OD. The area around the college is built-up, so views of the buildings are only available from the streets which immediately surround the college. The college buildings occupy the western half of the campus, while the eastern half is occupied by halls of residence (to the north) and existing and former playing fields (to the south and east).

Geology and soils

- 3.3 The solid geology of the area is Roker Formation Dolostone of the Permian period. These rocks are overlain by Devensian-Diamicton glacial till (<https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk>).

4. Historical and archaeological development

- 4.1 The site was the subject of an archaeological assessment in 2008 (Carlton 2008). The report concluded that there was no evidence that the site had been occupied during the prehistoric and Roman periods. However, given the proximity of activity in the wider landscape, particularly at the Roman fort of Arbeia which lies 2km to the north, there remained the potential for prehistoric and Roman features to be present.
- 4.2 Westoe was the site of a medieval village recorded in the 1183 Boldon Book. The site lies immediately to the south of the Westoe conservation area, which was the focal point of the medieval settlement. No contemporary buildings now remain, but it is likely that deposits relating to medieval activity are present. These would include activity relating to tenement plots, and also the survival of ploughing regimes and other evidence of agricultural practices.
- 4.3 The post-medieval development of Westoe was largely unaffected by the growth of industrial practices at South Shields and Jarrow, with the economy of the village remaining largely agricultural. Although Westoe now forms part of the large South Tyneside conurbation, the present village retains some 18th century houses. A 1768 plan of the site now occupied by South Tyneside College shows it was then a series of fields and crofts immediately to the south of the historic core of the village. By the mid-19th century, Westoe was developing as a residential area for South Shields and Sunderland, although the continued importance of agriculture was highlighted by the establishment of South Farm (also known as Westow Farm) at the north-west corner of the site. Ordnance Survey (OS) maps show that development of the area was characterised by an encroachment of buildings and gardens into the northern part of the site during the second half of the 19th century.
- 4.4 The development area remained largely unaltered throughout the first half of the 20th century. From 1952 onwards the site was redeveloped as the new campus of the South Shields Marine and Technical College. The origins of the college lay in the establishment of the South Shields Marine School, founded in 1861 following a bequest from local philanthropist Dr Thomas Winterbottom. In 1869 the Marine School moved into the world's first purpose-built seafarer training facilities on Ocean Road in South Shields (still extant as The Kirkpatrick public house) where it was based for around 90 years. However, by the post-war period the college was struggling financially, leading to it being incorporated into South Shields Marine and

Technical College. Initial work on the campus began in 1952 and involved the demolition of all buildings which then existed on the site and the removal of existing field boundaries. The first of the college buildings were opened to students on 6th February 1956, and the site was officially opened on 6th March 1964 by Prince Philip. It has remained a college ever since, evolving into South Tyneside College following the merger of the Marine and Technical College with Hebburn Technical College in 1984. The campus continues to host the South Shields Marine School to the present day, building on more than a century of marine education and training (<https://www.nautilusint.org/en/news-insight/telegraph/the-college-celebrating-150-years-of-maritime-education/>).

- 4.5 In 2022 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken in the playing fields on the east side of the campus. This found the remains of a late Victorian lodge (Fairfield House), but no other features of archaeological significance were encountered (McKelvey 2022).

5. The buildings

- 5.1 The college buildings were subject to level 1 recording comprising general shots of the exterior of the buildings. Level 2/3 building recording was undertaken of the former planetarium building.

The college buildings (Figure 2)

- 5.2 For administrative purposes the college has divided its education buildings into blocks (A-G and L), while the Doctor Winterbottom Hall accommodation blocks are referred to as DWH A-F. These codes generally incorporate buildings which were constructed during different phases of work and for different functions, although as the college is post-war in origin this has no significant impact on understanding its development. The original use of the buildings is detailed in a 1964 plan of the campus (TMW E.SS3/27). A catalogue of the buildings given in the Appendix lists the buildings by period of construction, and also records both the original function of each block and the modern block code.
- 5.3 Much of the college was constructed in a single extended period of construction between 1952 and 1964 (Carlton 2008, 19). The design of the buildings is typical of 1950s and 1960s educational architecture, and generally comprise brick and concrete structures faced with steel-framed glazing featuring coloured panels (Harwood, 2010). The early structures include almost all of the academic buildings (Blocks A-G) as well as one of the accommodation blocks (DWH F). Their construction was undertaken in four sub-phases which is detailed in the 1964 plan of the campus (TMW E.SS3/27):
- Stage 1: the north half of Block A, the western half of block C, and the north end of Block E (Photos 1-6).
 - Stage 2: the central part of Block A, the western half of Block B, the eastern half of Block C, and the central part of Block E (Photos 7-11).
 - Stage 3: the Planetarium (see paragraphs 5.5-11), most of the southern end of Block A, the eastern half of Block B, all of Block D, and the southern end of Block E (Photos 12-20).
 - Stage 4: the completion of Block A, and the addition Blocks F and G. The 1969-70 OS map (surveyed 1955-68) shows that the earliest parts of the halls of residence (DWH F) had also been constructed at this time (Photos 21-27).

- 5.4 Further additions were made to the college in the 1970s. Assessment of the OS plans demonstrates that two buildings (Block L) were added to the north of the Engineering and Navigation Departments between 1968 and 1978 (Photos 28-29). Increased student accommodation was provided with the construction of the Dr Winterbottom Hall and blocks DWH A-E (Photos 30-37): a plaque records that these were designed by Meade Taylor and Wilson architects and constructed in 1978. OS plans show that the Gym building (Club 1861) was constructed during the 1980s (Photo 38). Subsequent to this the north-east corner Block F was rebuilt to add a glazed facade (Photo 22).

The Planetarium

Exterior

- 5.5 Construction of the planetarium belongs to the third phase of the original 1952-1964 period of construction of the college. It is a semi-subterranean structure comprised of three elements. The main chamber of the building is a square brick structure, with only the top half metre or so visible above ground level (Photo 12). The best views of the building are from the north and east (Photos 39 and 40), due to the presence of vegetation to the south and west. The northern face of the building presents three courses of brickwork laid in a stretcher pattern, while the eastern side shows six courses. The western half of the building is at a slightly lower level however, with 10 courses visible at the north-west corner (Photo 41). The brickwork is capped with narrow rectangular concrete coping, and the flat roof of the planetarium is surfaced with rectangular concrete paving slabs to form a terrace.
- 5.6 Placed on top of the brick structure is a fibreglass dome (Photos 12 and 39-41). This was constructed using 8 pre-formed sections fitted together. The base of the dome was suspended above the roof of the main chamber by an internal structure to form a circular eaves. The recess underneath was sealed with concrete to prevent water seeping back under the dome and into the chamber.
- 5.7 The main chamber of the planetarium is accessed via a north/south corridor, which is also semi-subterranean. The top six courses of the external west face are exposed (Photo 42), but the rest of this face and all of the east side are below ground level. The roof of the corridor is surfaced with the same concrete paving slabs used to cover the main chamber. Access to the corridor is gained via a small above-ground single-story steel-framed rectangular glass atrium typical of the 1960s period of construction (Photo 43). This is aligned east/west, parallel to the main college building from which it is entered through a pair of double doors at ground level.

Interior

- 5.8 The visitor entered the west end of the atrium through the college, and was immediately presented with a partially obscured view of the dome of the planetarium (Photo 44). A flight of stairs to the east descended to the floor level of the access corridor (Photos 45), which turned south. A pair of double doors mid-way along the corridor originally prevented light leaking into the planetarium (Photo 46), but this appears to have not been fully effective as a black curtain was later added across the north end of the corridor (Photo 45). Water ingress through the roof of the corridor had caused some of the render to fall off, exposing the underside of concrete slabs which supports the terrace above. A single door on the eastern side of the south end of the corridor gave access to a plant room (Photo 47) for air circulation.

- 5.9 A second set of double doors at the southern end of the corridor opened onto the planetarium itself (Photo 48). The main room was circular (Photos 49 and 50), with the underside of the dome exposed to allow projections of the night sky to be shown (Photo 51). At the time of the site visit the room retained neither the projector, which would have occupied the middle of the room, nor the control panel or seating for visitors.
- 5.10 The interior walls and dome were faced with panels: for the dome these had been cut to adhere to the rounded shape, with a central pentagon at the apex (Photo 52). The dome interior exhibited water damage, showing that the structure was no longer watertight; the carpet was also damp. An internal gutter around the edge of the dome housed upward-facing fluorescent tube lighting (Photo 53). This appears to have been a replacement for downward facing lighting (Photo 54). The presence of two pairs of large air vents set into the north-east and south-west walls of the room indicates that the planetarium probably got quite hot during use (Photos 55-56).
- 5.11 The construction of a circular planetarium within a square structure created four corners which could be used for other purposes. The north-east corner was enlarged to the north to allow it to be occupied by the plant room. The other three corners were probably used for storage, although only the south-east corner retained shelving. The south-east and north-west storage spaces were each accessed by two doorless openings (Photos 57-58), while the south-west space was accessed via a single doorway. A fire exit and a window were located on the south side of the room (Photo 59): historic mapping indicates this opened onto an external staircase which rose to the west, although the area is now heavily overgrown.
- 5.12 In 2005 the then astronomy lecturer at South Tyneside College, Eva Hans, was interviewed by The Journal (<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Stars+In+her+eyes.-a0137256472>). The article records that the planetarium was fitted with a Spitz A3P projector, and that it had seating for up to 75 people. Pre-war projectors were expensive due to the requirement for a globe to project the stars, prohibiting their widespread use. However, from the late 1940s onwards Armand Spitz designed a series of more affordable models (the A1 and A2) which used a dodecahedron as the star projector. This significantly lowered the cost of acquiring a projector for institutions. Spitz was able to further refine his designs, and by the 1960s was producing the A3P which used a more conventional spherical star projector. These new models made it practical for planetariums such as the one at South Tyneside College to be established, and the A3P become one of the most common projectors used in planetariums (https://www.ips-planetarium.org/page/a_chartrand1973). This affordability coincided with an increase in public interest astronomy due to the start of the Space Race between the USA and the Soviet Union, leading to thousands of children in the region having their first planetarium experience at South Tyneside college.
- 5.13 A 2008 BBC news article recorded that the both the planetarium and observatory had closed in 2006, and that the existing equipment was relocated to Wynyard planetarium and observatory (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7539516.stm>). The building was used for a period of time as a multifaith chaplaincy, but at the time of the visit it was in a poor condition, and was used only for storage.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The significance of South Tyneside college lies in its origins as a maritime college rather than in the architecture of the existing buildings. Designed as a Marine and Technical college, the architecture employed owes nothing to the original 1867-9 Marine School building on Ocean Road, which was constructed in an Elizabethan revival style in red brick with stone dressings. The present college buildings were mainly erected between 1952 and 1964. They drew their design from contemporary educational architecture, with the widespread use of steel frames with both clear and coloured (often vibrant) glazing, as well as brick and concrete. Most of the buildings were equipped with flat roofs, with the exception of the workshops at the north and south ends of Block E which feature distinctive sawtooth roofs whose shape may have deliberately evoked waves.
- 6.2 The planetarium at South Tyneside College has significance as the first such facility in North-East England, introducing students at the college and residents and school children from the wider region to the night sky. It remained in use from the early 1960s until 2006 when it was finally closed. In 2008 the planetarium was stripped of its projector, and at around the same time the original seating was also removed to leave just the shell of the building. The loss of the projecting equipment and the seating which were integral to the original design and function of the building has impacted on the overall significance of the surviving structure. Additionally, the purpose-built nature of the building meant that it was difficult to repurpose. After period of use as an interfaith chaplaincy the space was subsequently used for the storage of furniture and equipment from the college. As the room had fallen out of regular use it was no longer properly maintained. As a consequence it is now in a poor condition, with clear evidence for water ingress through the dome and also through the main access corridor.

7. Sources

Cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey 1:1250 1969 sheet NZ 3765 NW
 Ordnance Survey 1:1250 1971 Sheet NZ 3766 SW

Archives consulted

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<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Stars+In+her+eyes.-a0137256472>

Appendix: Index of buildings

Building stage	Description (1964 plan: TMW E.SS3/27)	Block	Date	Photos
1	Administration	A	1952-64	1
1	Navigation Department	A	1952-64	2-3
1	Marine and Mechanical Engineering Department (W end)	C	1952-64	4
1	Workshops	E	1952-64	5-6
2	Electrical and Radio Department	A	1952-64	7
2	Entrance building	B	1952-64	8
2	Communal space (Café)	B	1952-64	9-10
2	Marine and Mechanical Engineering Department (E end)	C	1952-64	11
2	Building Department	E	1952-64	6
3	Planetarium	None	1952-64	12 & 39-59
3	Science Department	A	1952-64	13-14
3	Kitchens	B	1952-64	15-16
3	Women's Work Department	B	1952-64	16
3	Accommodation	B	1952-64	17
3	Commerce and Art Department	D	1952-64	18
3	Physical Education Department	E	1952-64	19
3	Workshops	E	1952-64	6
4	Science Department	A	1952-64	-
4	Workshops	E	1952-64	20
4	Workshops	F	1952-64	21-22
4	Engineering and Navigation Departments	G	1952-64	23-24
4	Halls of residence	DWH F	1952-64	25-27
n/a	Additional blocks	L	1970-78	28-29
n/a	Dr Winterbottom Hall and halls of residence	DWH Admin, Refectory, and A-E	1978-present	30-37
n/a	1861 Club	None	1978-present	38



Photograph 1: The college administration building (western projection of the north end of Block A), looking south-east



Photograph 2: The Navigation department (north end of Block A), looking east



Photograph 3: The observatory at the north end of the Navigation department (north end of Block A), looking east. The observatory is now disused.



Photograph 4: The Marine and Mechanical Engineering Department (Block C) looking south-west



Photograph 5: Workshops (north end of Block E), looking south-east



Photograph 6: Workshops (Block E), looking south. Note the sawtooth roofline.



Photograph 7: Electrical and Radio Department (western projection of the centre of Block A), looking south-east



Photograph 8: Entrance Building (western side of Block B), looking north-east



Photograph 9 (left): Flagpole and anchor outside the entrance building, looking north

Photograph 10 (below): The communal building (western side of Block B), looking east





Photograph 11: East end of the Navigation Department (east end of Block C) with link to the building department and workshops, looking south-east



Photograph 12: The planetarium dome, looking south. The planetarium is now disused



Photograph 13: Science Department (south end of Block A), looking north-east



Photograph 14: Science Department (western projection of the south end of Block A), looking north



Photograph 15 (above): The kitchen department (south face of Block B), looking north-west



Photograph 16 (left): The women's work department (north face of Block B), looking south-east



Photograph 17: Accommodation block attached to the Women's Work Department (north side of Block B), looking west



Photograph 18: The Commerce and Art Department (Block D), looking north-west



Photograph 19: The Physical Education Department (south end of Block E), looking north-west



Photograph 20: Extension to the workshops (west face of the north end of Block E), looking east



Photograph 21: Workshops (south end of Block F), looking west



Photograph 22: Workshops (north end of Block F), looking south



Photograph 23: Engineering and Navigation Department (Block G), looking north-west



Photograph 24: Engineering and Navigation Department (Block G), looking south-west



Photograph 25: 1960s accommodation block (DHW F), looking south



Photograph 26: 1960s accommodation block (DHW F), looking north-east



Photograph 27: 1960s accommodation block (DHW F), looking north



Photograph 28: 1970s college buildings (Block L), looking east



Photograph 29: 1970s college buildings (Block L), looking east



Photograph 30: Plaque on the side of the Dr Winterbottom Hall, looking north



Photograph 31: Entrance to Dr Winterbottom Hall (DWH Admin), looking north-east



Photograph 32: Common Room (DWH Admin), looking south



Photograph 33: Dr Winterbottom Hall Refectory, looking west



Photograph 34: Accommodation blocks (DWH A&B), looking north



Photograph 35: Accommodation Block (DWH C), looking south



Photograph 36: Accommodation Block (DWH D-E), looking north-east



Photograph 37: Accommodation block, looking north



Photograph 38: Gymnasium, looking north-east



Photograph 39: Planetarium dome, looking south-east



Photograph 40: Planetarium dome, looking south-west



Photograph 41 (left): North-west corner of the planetarium, looking south-east



Photo 42 (below): West wall of the planetarium corridor, looking east



Photograph 43: Atrium of the planetarium, looking west



Photograph 44: View of the planetarium dome from the atrium, looking south-east



Photograph 45: Atrium staircase, looking east



Photograph 46: Planetarium corridor, looking south



Photograph 47 (left): Plant room, looking east

Photograph 48 (below): Double-doors opening into the planetarium, looking north-west

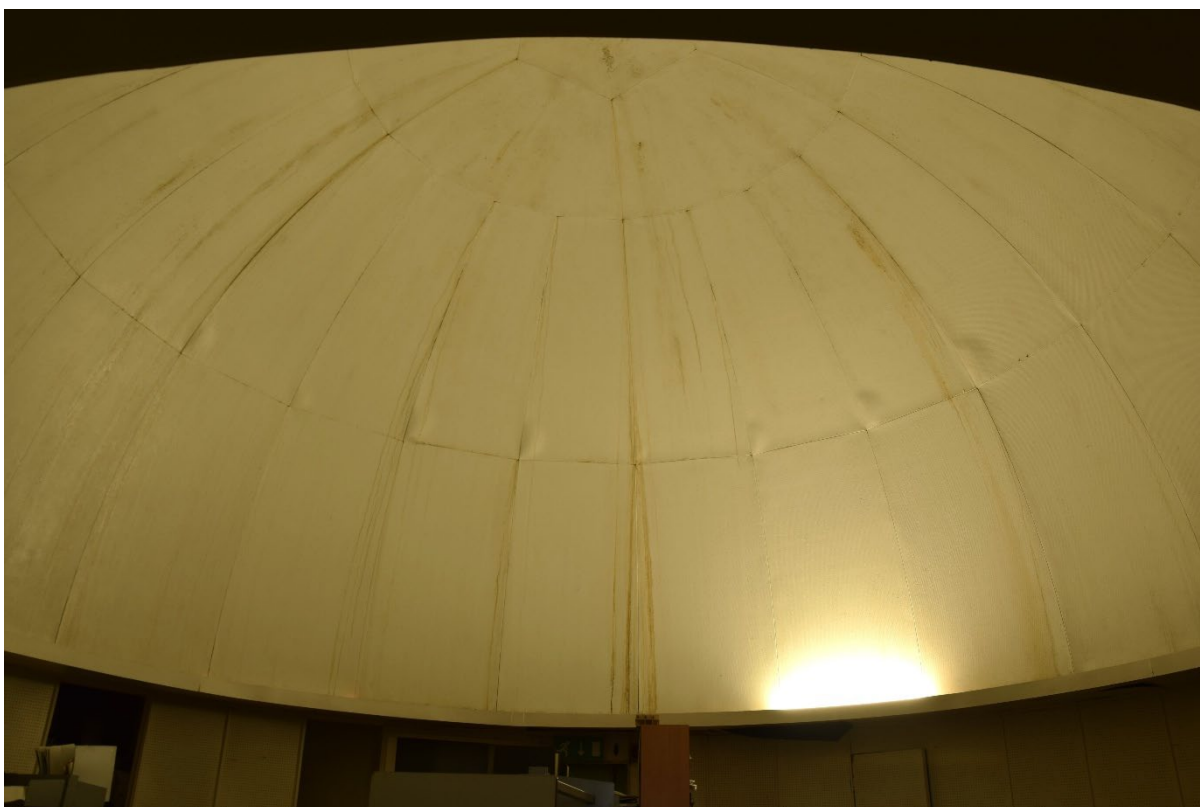




Photograph 49: East side of the planetarium, looking south-east



Photograph 50: West side of the planetarium, looking south



Photograph 51: View of the planetarium dome, looking south



Photograph 52: View of the apex of the dome, looking south



Photograph 53 (left): Gutter around the internal edge of the planetarium dome for fluorescent tube lighting, looking east



Photograph 54 (below): Down-lighting set into the gutter, looking west



Photograph 55: Air vents in the east wall of the planetarium, looking north-east



Photograph 56: Air vents in the west wall of the planetarium, looking south



Photograph 57: Cupboard at the south-east corner of the planetarium, looking south-east



Photograph 58: Cupboard at the north-west corner of the planetarium, looking west



Photograph 59: Fire escape door on the south side of the planetarium, looking south

Figure 1: Site location



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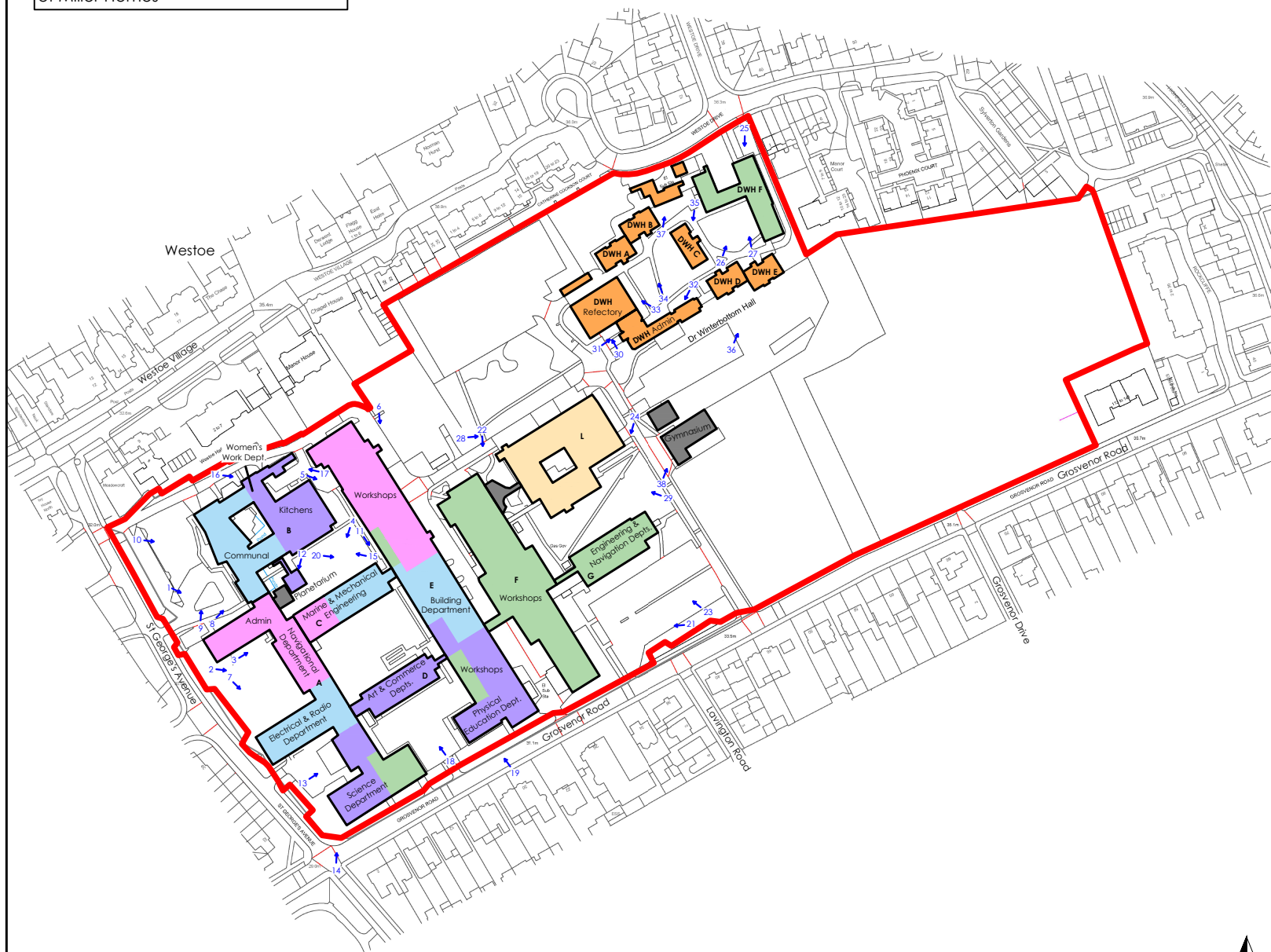
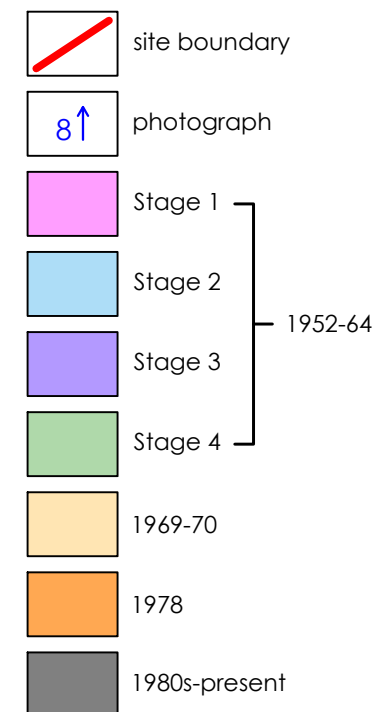
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report 6418

Figure 2: Site as existing

0 150m
scale 1:3000 for A4 plot

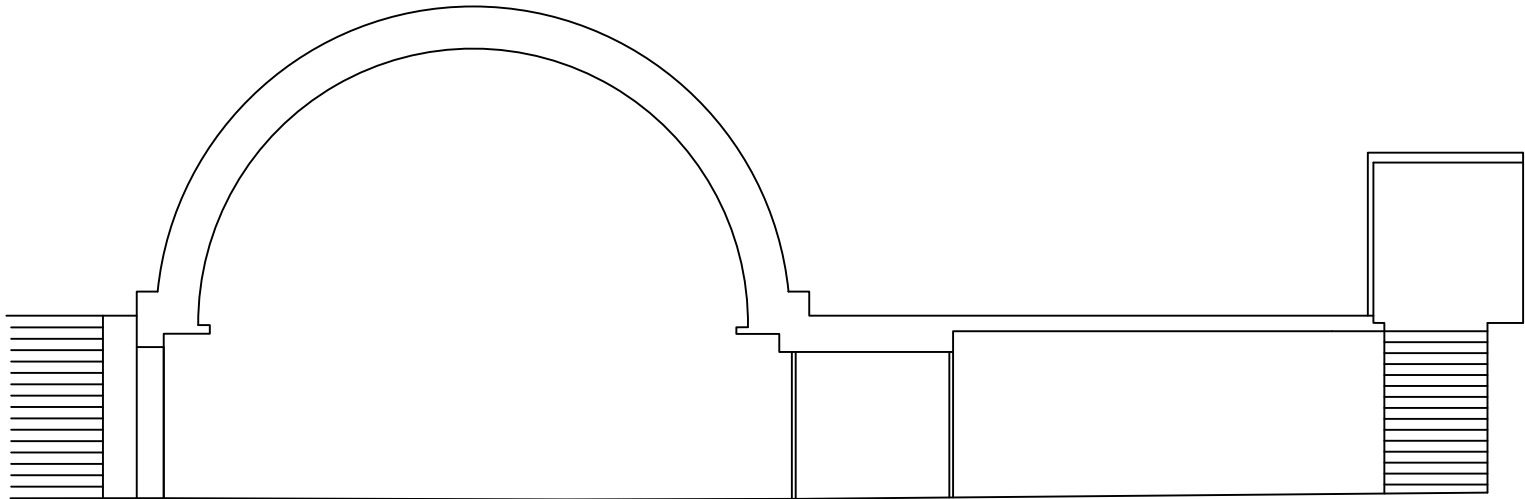




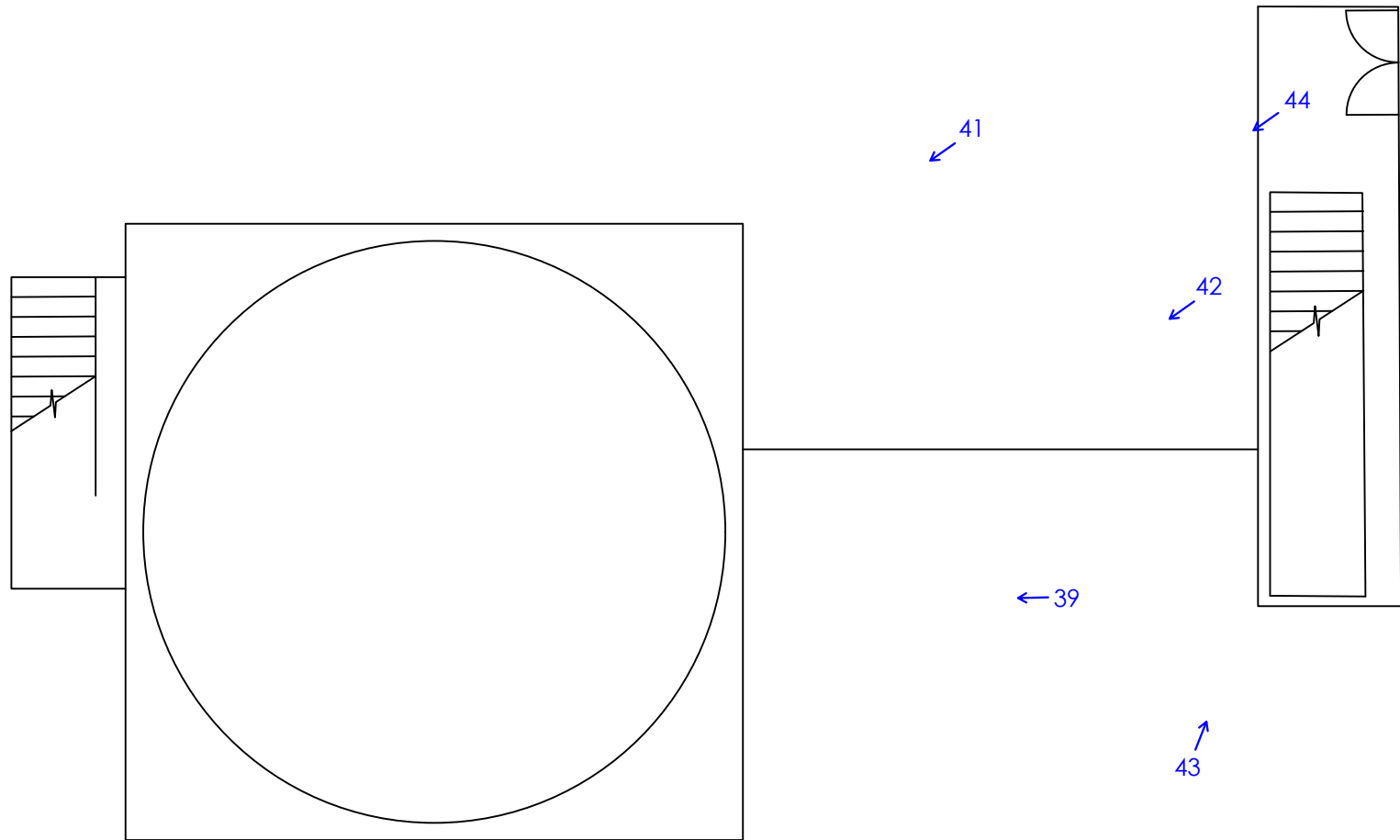
position of external survey



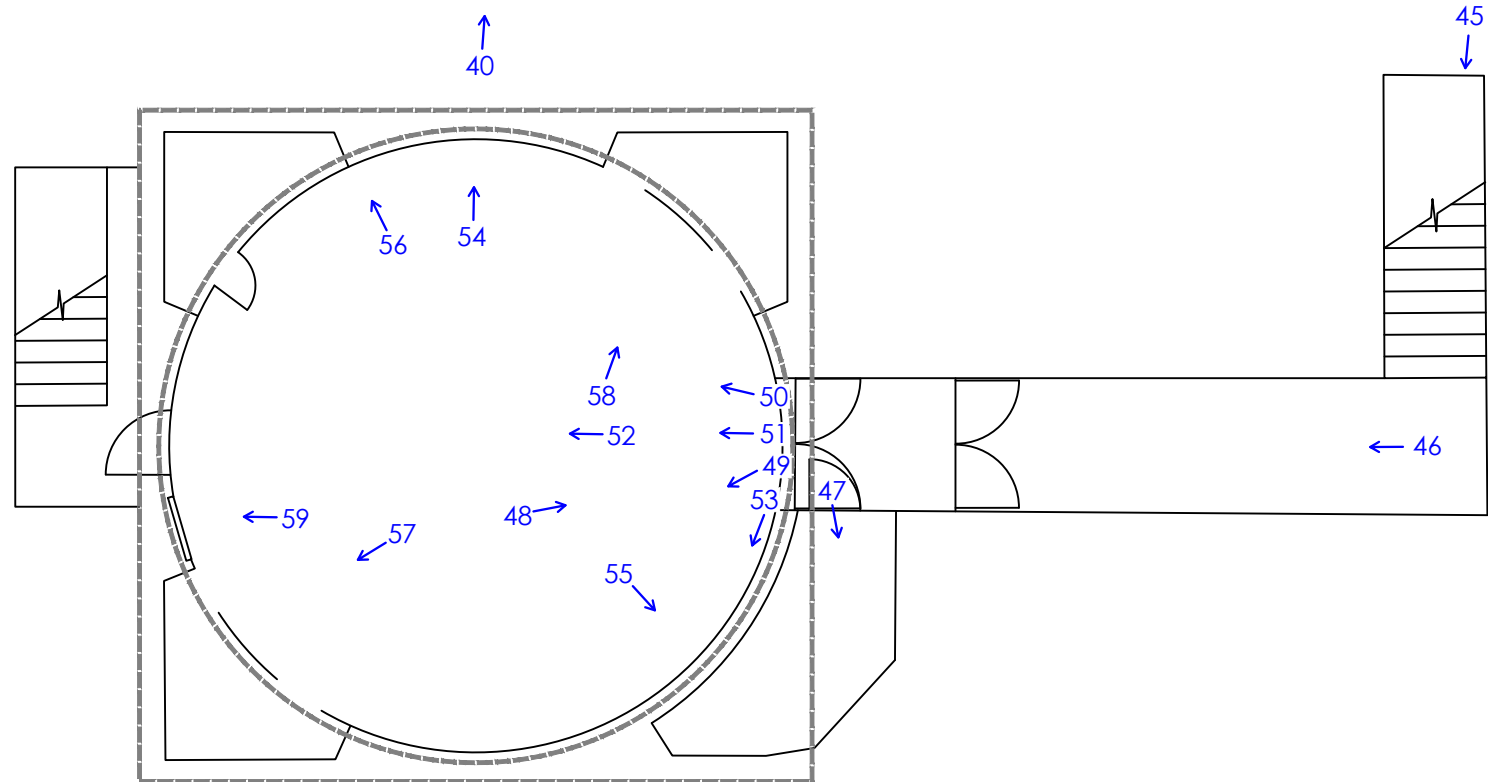
photograph



Elevation



Ground level (external)



Below ground level (internal)

